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INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 02 BAGHDAD 001857

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PGOV PHUM I2

SUBJECT: HOMOSEXUALS FLEE IRAQ IN THE FACE OF CONTINUED PERSECUTION

* Missing Section 001 *

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group, probably Jaysh al-Mahdi or Al-Qaeda in Iraq." He is concerned that his partner's attackers would track him down through his cell phone, but so far had managed to evade them, though he does regularly receive threats by text message. He believes that religious extremist groups are behind most of the violence, and is afraid to go to the police for assistance.

-- Zagros is a Kurd from Erbil whose father is a "high-ranking official" within the KRG. He told us he is aware of numerous gay men who were arrested and tortured by the Asayesh (Kurdish security) forces because of their sexual orientation. He appeared visibly terrified of being captured by the Asayesh and claimed that Kurdistan is "no better than the rest of Iraq" in respecting LGBT rights.

-- Nashwan fled Baghdad for Bayji (in Salah al-Din province) two months ago and has been in hiding ever since. He has been beaten multiple times, received e-mails threatening to kill him and was followed to and from his job in Baghdad until he eventually was forced to leave the capital, fearing for his safety. He had previously escaped Iraq for Syria, and returned earlier this year when it appeared that violence in Baghdad had decreased. Like the other two men, he fears the police almost as much as the militias.

¶6. (C) Embassy's Refugee and IDP Affairs Office and political section, in conjunction with RRT Erbil, are working to locate funds to support the efforts of Heartland Alliance and UNAMI to help resettle these three at-risk individuals and others who may seek assistance in the future.

Diplomacy Hits a Brick Wall

¶7. (C) Following the up-tick in attacks on Iraqi LGBTs in April and May, Embassy formulated an engagement strategy to combat this violence. During the past two months, Emboffs have quietly raised the issue with members of parliament, the Iraqi Minister of Human Rights, the Kurdish Minister of Human Rights, the Ministry of Interior's (MOI's) Director of Human Rights and other GOI officials. While some have been shocked at the atrocities committed in the name of Islam, none were willing to publicly defend or work to protect the rights of LGBT citizens.

¶8. (C) Many of the GOI's most ardent defenders of human rights did not view the issue as a serious problem. When pressed, the MOI official agreed that those committing the violence should be arrested, but also that the victim should be apprehended for violating Shari'a. The Iraqi Minister of

Human Rights agreed that such attacks were problematic, but noted a multitude of other, more pressing issues facing her country. The Kurdish Minister of Human Rights appeared more sympathetic to LGBT rights, but noted that "this is not the time" to publicly raise the issue, fearing a backlash which would only lead to more violence. Parliamentarians also did not demonstrate any desire to raise the issue in Parliament.

Comment

¶9. (C) It is clear that LGBT persons in Iraq have nowhere to turn. Hunted by religious extremists, ignored by the police and unable to ask their families for help, many have sought to resettle outside of the country. While reports of violence have subsided for the time being, LGBT individuals still face daily persecution. Due to the sensitive nature of the issue, and the unwillingness of GOI officials to address the topic, it is unlikely that the situation will improve any time soon. Embassy is therefore working closely with UNAMI, UNHCR, and various NGOs to help these people escape from an untenable position. End comment.

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